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Before You Even Think About Breeding Your Dog

Breeding is not for beginners. It is as hard to do well as it is easy to do. Until you can satisfy the requirements that the serious hobby breeder should meet, as presented in the section entitled *Choosing A Reputable Breeder*, you will be doing the breed an injustice if you have a litter of puppies.



CONSIDER YOUR MOTIVES

If you think that:

1. **HAVING PUPPIES WOULD BE FUN;** it is also very time consuming and demanding. By four weeks of age a Cocker litter puppies is active, dirty, noisy and potentially destructive. Illness or death of the dam or puppies can be expensive, emotional — and no fun at all.
2. **IT WOULD BE EDUCATIONAL FOR THE CHILDREN;** so would a litter of hamsters. Bitches do not whelp at your convenience, and the children are often in school or in bed at the time of delivery. Care of the pregnant bitch, and properly raising and socializing puppies, is work for a responsible adult.
3. **IT WOULD HELP US GET BACK OUR INVESTMENT;** you may find that the rate of return is very low. Stud fee, veterinary fees, advertising, and the daily care and feeding of a litter are very expensive. You may only be able to sell a few of the puppies out of a large litter; even experienced breeders sometimes have difficulty selling puppies.
4. **IT WOULD HELP FULFILL THE DOG'S NEEDS;** you are anthropomorphizing. While the instinct for procreation is strong, the dog has no conscious knowledge of what it is missing, no regrets and no guilt feelings. Spaying or neutering will remove the instinct and the problems often associated with it, such as wandering and marking. Pregnancy not only contributes nothing to a bitch's health, but sometimes causes problems. A spayed bitch cannot be accidentally bred, and will not be subject to the uterine infections common in older, intact females.
5. **IT WILL IMPROVE THE BITCH'S TEMPERAMENT IF SHE IS BRED;** you are wrong. No animal whose temperament needs improving should be bred in the first place, since temperament is most often the result of hereditary factors. And while raising a litter will not only NOT make an improvement in the dam's temperament, it will also probably result in a litter of unsatisfactory puppies who have been imprinted by their unstable dam. There is also the possibility that the bitch will be an unsatisfactory mother, necessitating much more work on your part.

CONSIDER YOUR RESOURCES

Raising a litter is a demanding project. Do you:

1. **HAVE THE FACILITIES FOR WHELPING AND RAISING A LITTER PROPERLY?** You need a warm, quiet, secure area, easily cleaned, for properly confining and caring for a litter of fast-growing puppies while they are with their mother, and a similar, larger area for use after weaning.
2. **HAVE THE TIME TO DEVOTE TO THIS PROJECT?** Time to take or send a bitch for breeding, sit up for hours during whelping, and hand-raise the litter if the bitch is unable to? Time to buy and

prepare food, feed, and clean up four or five times daily? Time to go to the veterinarian for check-ups, inoculations, and with a sick dam or puppy? Time to scrub floors and pens, clean up feces and urine, and give medication? Time to individually socialize each puppy daily? Time to answer phone calls, talk with prospective buyers, and answer the same questions over and over again? Time for all the paperwork required, including typing accurate pedigrees, health records, care instructions, records of sales, and so on?

3. **HAVE THE MONEY TO PUT INTO THE PROJECT?** Can you afford to pay the stud fee, inoculations and veterinary care for the bitch and puppies, as well as other expenses? What if the bitch has problems that necessitate a caesarean section? What if the puppies die? What if the bitch dies, or cannot raise the puppies? Can you afford to feed and provide veterinary care for two or three four-month-old puppies that didn't sell? Can you afford to refund the purchase price on a puppy that proves to be unsound or unsuitable? Can you find a new home or keep puppies that are returned to you? What will you do if the puppies you sell develop hereditary problems in the future and owners sue you for compensation for the costs of caring for the dogs?

CONSIDER YOUR DOG'S QUALITY

Is your dog truly an outstanding representative of the breed? Pretty, friendly and smart is not nearly enough.

1. **TEMPERAMENT.** Your dog must be absolutely sound and stable, with a personality and disposition appropriate for the breed. Shyness, aggressiveness, gun shyness, lack of retrieving ability or trainability, and hyperactivity are all reasons not to breed, regardless of other problems.
2. **BREED TYPE AND QUALITY.** Your dog must be structurally and functionally sound, with conformation characteristics appropriate for the breed. An experienced, knowledgeable exhibitor/breeder can assist in the evaluation of your dog's adherence to the Breed Standard.
3. **SOUNDNESS.** Your dog should be tested free of certain genetic defects, as should the proposed mate. Do you know the genetic defects associated with Cocker. You can learn about them in the section on hereditary defects. Knowledge of the status of parents, grandparents, siblings, etc. with regard to genetic testing is also desirable. Do you know the health of the dogs parents, grandparents and siblings? **HIPS** should be properly X-rayed, and the X-rays submitted to the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals or PennHIP to be read as free of hip dysplasia. **HEARTS** should be examined by a board-certified cardiologist. **EYES** should be examined annually by a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist and be free of hereditary cataracts, progressive retinal atrophy, and any other eye anomaly. **ELBOWS** should be properly X-rayed and the X-rays submitted to the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals or a board-certified veterinary radiologist, to be read as free of elbow dysplasia.
4. Any inheritable defects, including but not limited to retained testicles, overshot or undershot jaw, congenital heart defects, eye defects, recurrent skin problems, thyroid deficiency, immunological problems, orthopedic problems and recurrent seizures or epilepsy occurring in either parent are all reasons not to breed, regardless of other qualities.
5. **PEDIGREE.** A four or five generation pedigree on the proposed litter should be read and interpreted by a person with extensive knowledge of the breed and of the dogs involved. Titles alone are no guarantee of genetic value.
6. **HEALTH.** A breeding animal must be fully mature, in the prime of health, and in lean muscular condition. All inoculations should be up to date, and the animal should be free of both internal and external parasites. Acquired problems such as narrow birth canal from previous injury, canine brucellosis, transmissible venereal tumor, anemia, any disease or infection of the reproductive

organs, concurrent diseases of other organ systems, or any contagious diseases are all reasons not to breed.

CONSIDERATIONS OF THE STUD DOG OWNER

If you are thinking of using your male at stud, you are no less responsible for the quality of the litter than the owner of the brood bitch. You have the obligation of thoroughly screening every owner that inquires for stud service and the bitch to be bred; of traveling to and from the airport to pick up and return bitches sent in for breeding; of boarding and caring for bitches that are sent to you; of carrying out the breeding; of supplying pedigrees, photos, and examination reports; and of keeping meticulous records. This is all done as circumstances dictate, and not at your convenience; the weekend away you had planned may well be spent at home looking after a visiting bitch instead.

CONSIDER THE CURRENT DOG POPULATION

If, at this point, you are still considering breeding your dog, VISIT the dog pound, Humane Society or animal shelter in the city nearest you. Ask how many dogs are euthanized monthly, and how many euthanized in the last month were Cocker Spaniels.

GOLDEN RETRIEVER, Excerpted from AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOLDEN RETRIEVER, by The Golden Retriever Club of America, Inc. Education Committee

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